



Communities in Schools – Helping Our Kids Succeed

When the City of Renton teamed up with the Renton School District in 1995 to form Communities in Schools of Renton, we had a vision to help students achieve their maximum potential. Since that time over 9,600 children have received support from a Family Liaison, and every week 118 children are mentored by an adult. The city is proud to be part of this great effort, and many city employees are mentors.

I recently attended the Communities in Schools annual benefit dinner. It was very encouraging to see the community support and the number of mentors who have made a personal commitment to share their perspective and time to help our students succeed. But it also brought attention to the fact that our most important task as a community is to help our children develop the skills and character to succeed. The future of our students and how well they do is not just an "education issue." It's also an economic issue, a civic issue, a social issue and a safety issue. And ... it's everybody's issue.

As a community we need to continue to work together to make sure that every child can succeed. We can support our schools by bringing the community, through volunteers and resources, into the schools to help kids in need and at risk. Communities in Schools has two prevention-focused programs to provide a holistic approach to meeting the needs of children and families. The Family Liaison program helps stabilize a family situation and provide support for parents or guardians to take necessary steps toward family self-sufficiency. The Mentor Program has been improving the social, emotional, and academic development of children identified as being at risk of school failure. Caring community volunteers foster a personal relationship with the children in this program.

Mentors are friends, teachers, coaches, and role models. They open doors of opportunity, convey values, and help provide stability. Mentoring reflects the great strength of the human connection. Mentors provide experiences for our youth so they can explore new careers and learn about opportunities that help prepare the future workforce of Renton. Once a week for one hour, mentors meet with their mentees at school. Together the mentor and student decide how to spend their time – they can play games, read, work on a school project or just talk. That one hour with a mentor can make a significant difference in the life of a child.

I urge you to join me and other community members to invest in our most valuable resource, our children. For more information or to get involved, please contact Erin Iverson at 425-430-6659 or visit the Communities In Schools web page at <http://www.renton.ciswa.org>.

This article first appeared in the Renton Reporter on January 30, 2008.